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SUBJECT: FEFA: THE AFGHAN VOICE IN ELECTION OBSERVATION

REF: KABUL 891

¶1. SUMMARY: Domestic observation will be key to Afghan perceptions of legitimacy in the August 20 presidential and provincial council elections. The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FeFA), an umbrella organization of over 15 civil society groups, will serve as Afghanistan's only major domestic observer group. With assistance from UNDP, FeFA has developed an observation plan for the current electoral cycle, focusing on data collection and analysis; FeFA plans to rally around 8,000 observers for election day. FeFA still faces the challenges of working out cooperating mechanisms with other observer bodies, developing the quality of its reporting analysis, and articulating a post-election plan. END SUMMARY.

FeFA TRACKS CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

¶2. FeFA's Kabul headquarters staff and provincial representatives are currently observing the candidate registration period, which began April 25 and ends May 8. Registration is occurring in provincial capitals for provincial council candidates and in Kabul for presidential candidates (reftel). The political campaign period, running from June 16 to August 17, will mark the second observation period. The final observation period incorporates voting day and the counting process; this phase will include roughly 7,600 observers in polling centers and engage the 400 district trainers as mobile observation teams. If a run-off is required, FeFA will implement the same observer deployment plan used for voting day.

RIGHT-SIZING THE OBSERVATION PLAN

¶3. FeFA soon will expand its staff beyond its permanent core of 25 headquarters employees. FeFA has identified and trained long-term volunteers to fill its 34 provincial representative (PR) positions - one per province. FeFA is also hiring one women's outreach officer in every province with the goal of recruiting 40 percent female staff; 20 percent more than in previous electoral cycles.

¶4. FeFA will also identify 7,600 voting day observers, recruiting individuals to work in their home districts. By enlisting locals, FeFA hopes community support will reduce security risks for observers in polling centers. Observers will work up to 10 days and receive stipends for food, transportation and security as their only form of remuneration. If a run-off occurs, staffing periods would extend to cover the second round. (Four to six weeks before voting day, FeFA will engage 400 district trainers. Reporting to the PRs, these trainers will lead recruitment and observer training at the district level.)

UNDP ASSISTS IN FOCUSING FEFA EFFORTS

¶5. UNDP is reviewing FeFA's USD 2.6 million proposed work plan for elections observation. UNDP officials anticipate

finalizing the agreement with FeFA within the week. The plan is scaled down from FeFA's first proposal for the 2009 elections, which had a USD 8 million price tag and strayed from its core mission of election observation. FeFA's revised plan includes observation of the major portions of the electoral process (candidate registration, campaign period and voting day/counting), but focuses on data collection, analysis and subsequent reporting as its core activities.

BETTER QUALITY REPORTING?

¶16. FeFA and UNDP recently collaborated to improve the quality of FeFA's reporting. Imperfect methodology and a poor understanding of its mission had weakened FeFA's analysis in the past. A UNDP liaison officer advised FeFA in developing the plan for upcoming observation, focusing staff on the observer role and improving their understanding of data collection requirements.

¶17. The officer believes FeFA's future reports will reflect an improved methodology. FeFA plans to produce: a report on the candidate registration period; two reports on the campaign period; at least two statements over the course of voting day; a statement on counting after 24 hours; a final report on the elections. After election day, FeFA will hire staff to analyze and draft the final report, focusing on direct, secret and free voting and free participation. It estimates completing this final report three months after voting day. (A run-off would initiate another round of reporting.)

KABUL 00001136 002 OF 002

ESTABLISHING COORDINATION WITH KEY PARTNERS

¶18. FeFA is preparing to coordinate with other observer missions. As a member of the Asian Network for Free Election (ANFREL), FeFA invited ANFREL to participate in the elections. ANFREL requires funding which is not currently available, although donations from Australia or The Asia Foundation for ANFREL observation may be under consideration.

FeFA welcomed the opportunity to coordinate with international observer missions to deconflict mandates and promote the best possible observation effort.

¶19. FeFA also hopes to engage with the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). FeFA has published a report on recommendations for the ECC, emphasizing the importance of eliminating candidates with DIAG connection. FeFA plans to meet with the ECC soon to discuss its recommendations and how to improve both organizations' contributions to democratic process.

FeFA's FUTURE

¶10. Focusing on observation should enable FeFA to capitalize on its strengths. UNDP reps believed that through coordination on FeFA's observation plan, FeFA better understands its role, particularly distinguishing FeFA as an organization from the electoral observation project. FeFA needs sustainability between electoral cycles and hopes to expand its activities, to work with civil society.

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